



USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

# GAIN Report

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## Japan

## Asparagus

## Annual

## 2003

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**Report Highlights:**

Japanese production of asparagus is estimated at 30,500 metric tons in 2003, up approximately 8 percent from the previous year. The harvested area is also up approximately 4 percent to 7,500 hectares. The majority of Japanese asparagus is green asparagus with minimal white production. Japanese imports of fresh asparagus from the United States are projected at 2,700 metric tons in 2003, down slightly from last season. Among other imports, those from Mexico increased 52 percent to 3,401 metric tons in 2003.

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Includes PSD Changes: Yes  
Includes Trade Matrix: Yes  
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### **Japanese Asparagus Consumption Remains Stable**

Japanese consumption of fresh asparagus has been fairly stable and may increase slightly at approximately 50,000 metric tons annually. Demand remains high because asparagus are easy to prepare, and provide health benefits. Like broccoli and other green vegetables are largely consumed in Japan for nutrition reasons, the Japanese believe that asparagus provides energy because the high amino acid content is a great protein source. This is also why green asparagus is preferred over its white counterpart. Fresh asparagus is available through out the year, with the heavy consumption in the spring and early summer, coinciding with the domestic production season.

### **Imports of U.S. Asparagus Forecast Down Slightly in 2003**

Imports of fresh asparagus from the United States are projected at 2,700 metric tons for the 2003 season, down slightly from last season, according to Tokyo traders. Imports from January-April 2003 were 2,042 metric tons relatively unchanged from the previous year, but the imports in May and June are expected to decline slightly due to strong domestic production. In early June, domestic asparagus was traded at 10 to 15 percent lower prices than the previous season at Tokyo's wholesale markets. This season's low price market situation made U.S. asparagus difficult to market. Japan imported 2,796 metric tons of fresh U.S. asparagus in 2002, valued at \$10.29 million (CIF).

### **U.S. Asparagus Maintained Competitiveness through Boat Shipments**

Japan's sluggish economy has left consumers more value conscious and forced greater price competition. The U.S. has maintained its competitive edge by using controlled atmosphere container facilities and shipping by boat to reduce import costs significantly while maintaining freshness. Previously, asparagus's short shelf life was addressed by air shipping all product to Japan. Currently, over 50 percent of U.S. asparagus is shipped to Japan by boat in controlled atmosphere containers. Shipments take approximately 10 days from the West Coast of the U.S. and the product is sold within 3 to 5 days of arrival.

### **Asparagus Production Forecast Up 8 Percent in 2003**

Japanese production of fresh asparagus is estimated at 30,500 metric tons in 2003, up approximately 8 percent from the previous year, according to industry sources. The harvested area for asparagus is also up approximately 4 percent to 7,500 hectares. Because of consumers prefer green asparagus, most domestic production green.

Cold temperatures and high precipitation in April delayed production, but did not affect volumes when temperatures rose in early May. The peak Japanese asparagus production is May and June with the shipments from Nagano, Hokkaido and Fukushima Prefectures. Nagasaki and Saga Prefectures, on the southern-most island of Kyushu, produce asparagus in early spring before northern Japan producers go into full swing.

In late May, domestic asparagus from Nagano and Fukushima Prefectures traded at \$6.75 (802 yen) and \$6.69 (794 yen) per kilogram, respectively, at the Tokyo Wholesale Market. The same week, U.S. asparagus traded at \$4.77 (567 yen) per kilogram. In early June, Tokyo supermarkets sold domestic asparagus at \$1.66 (198 yen) for a bundle of 150 grams (approximately 7 spears of asparagus) and U.S. asparagus at \$0.82 (98 yen) for a bundle of 100 grams (approximately 4 spears).

\* The exchange rate of 118.66 yen per dollar is based on the Nikkei News on June 4, 2003.

**Mexico Leads other Import Competition with a 52 Percent Increase**

Australia is the largest supplier of fresh asparagus to Japan with the shipments during fall and winter. However, asparagus imports from Mexico were 3,401 metric tons and up 52 percent January-April 2003. Mexico increased asparagus shipments to Japan significantly in February and March this year when the domestic harvest was delayed due to cold weather. Year-round exports from the Philippines and Thailand were relatively unchanged. Japan imported \$77.9 million (CIF) of fresh asparagus from the world in 2002.

## PS&amp;D Tables and Trade Matrices

## Fresh Asparagus PS&amp;D Table

## PSD Table

Country	Japan					
Commodity	Fresh Asparagus					
	(HA)(MT)					
	2000	Revised	2001	Estimate	2002	Forecast
	USDA	Post	USDA	Post	USDA	Post
	Official	Estimate	Official	Estimate	Official	Estimate
	[Old]	[New]	[Old]	[New]	[Old]	[New]
Market Year Begin	01/2001		01/2002		01/2003	
Area Planted	7700	7630	0	7230	0	7500
Area Harvested	7700	7630	0	7230	0	7500
TOTAL Production	31500	28700	0	28300	0	30500
Imports, Fresh	20000	22054	0	19363	0	20000
TOTAL SUPPLY	51500	50754	0	47663	0	50500
Exports, Fresh	0	0	0	0	0	0
Domestic Fresh Market	50000	49474	0	46963	0	49750
For Processing	1500	1280	0	700	0	750
TOTAL UTILIZATION	51500	50754	0	47663	0	50500

## Fresh Asparagus Import Trade Matrix

# Import Trade Matrix

Country Japan

Commodity Fresh Asparagus

Time Period	Jan. - Dec.	Units:	Metric Tons
Imports for:	2001		2002
U.S.	3622	U.S.	2796
Others		Others	
Australia	6022	Australia	5691
Philippines	4362	Philippines	4023
Mexico	4056	Thailand	3102
Thailand	2148	Mexico	2325
New Zealand	1273	New Zealand	1046
China	372	China	180
Peru	90	Peru	105
France	69	France	65
Netherlands	31	Netherlands	21
Total for Others	18423		16558
Others not Listed	9		9
Grand Total	22054		19363

## Fresh Asparagus Wholesale Price Table

# Prices Table

**Country** Japan

**Commodity** Fresh Asparagus

 Prices in  per uom 

Year	2002	2003	% Change
Jan	1086	1079	-1%
Feb	998	801	-20%
Mar	972		-100%
Apr	1010		-100%
May	838		-100%
Jun	934		-100%
Jul	848		-100%
Aug	770		-100%
Sep	838		-100%
Oct	635		-100%
Nov	609		-100%
Dec	950		-100%

 Exchange Rate  Local Currency/US \$

 Date of Quote  MM/DD/YYYY